Adhere to the Group of the Muslims and Their Imam

The manhaj of Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama'h is based on two major principles: first, abiding by the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ in terms of belief, word, and act, and second, adhering to the group of Muslims. The more a Muslim adheres to these principles correctly, the closer he gets to be part of the victorious sect and the successful party of Allah. He will then be granted victory in this life and the hereafter, by Allah's permission.

As for the first principle, there is no guidance without it, as Allah says: "Say, 'Obey Allah and obey the Messenger; but if you turn away - then upon him is only that [duty] with which he has been charged, and upon you is that with which you have been charged. And if you obey him, you will be [rightly] guided. And there is not upon the Messenger except the [responsibility for] clear notification'" [An-Nur 54]. In fulfilling it is protection from misguidance originating from innovations and desires.

As for the second principle, in fulfilling it is survival for Muslims from conflict over worldly gains or disagreement in issues of religion which result in division, partisanship, disputes, and fighting. That matter will eventually end in failure and spoiling efforts, as Allah says: "And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allah upon you - when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favor, brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be guided. And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful. And do not be like the ones who became divided and differed after the clear proofs had come to them. And those will have a great punishment" [Al-'Imran 105-103]. The preceding scholars explained the meaning of the rope of Allah, that we are ordered to hold tight to it through the group of Muslims.

Our Lord blessed His worshipers with Islam and the group, when He reminded them of their status beforehand and how they used to hate and fight each other. He warned them from following the footsteps of the previous misguided nations, which were divided despite all that they had before, and they were punished with great torment. He clarified for them the right path that the righteous should follow inside the group of Muslims, that whenever they see wrong inside it, including injustice, sin, or innovation by the imam or his subjects, they should forbid vice and enjoin virtue. However, at the same time, they should remain within that group and not become rebels against it, who call to split its ranks and destroy its structure, for that is a greater sin than that agains which they rebelled, unless it is a blatant kufr, concerning which they have proof from Allah.

The Prophet ﷺ confirmed the importance of holding tight to the group of Muslims, and he declared the reality of that group and the criteria of its commitment, especially in the times of great fitnah and increased desires. It was narrated in the Hadith of Hudhayfah bin al-Yaman (may Allah be pleased with him), when he asked him about fitnah, saying: "Is there evil to come after this goodness?" He replied: "There will be callers at the gates of Hell; whoever responds to them they throw them into it." I said: "O Messenger of Allah, describe them to us." He said: "They will be from our people, speaking our language." I said: "What do you command me to do, if I live to see that?" He said: "Adhere to the main body of the Muslims and their leader. If there is no such body and no leader, then withdraw from all their groups, even if you bite onto the trunk of a tree until death finds you in that state." [Agreed upon]

The concept of the group of Muslims to which we are ordered to adhere, is tied to the concept of the leadership, and to hearing and obeying the imams of Muslims when they are right. If Muslims do not have one imam, then, then no one group will be found for them, but they will instead be scattered factions, and the Prophet ﷺ ordered to withdraw from all of them, as it is clear in the hHdith. This Hadith clarifies the close relationship between avoiding fitnah and shutting all doors to it, and adhering to the group of Muslims and its imam on a hand, and the increase of fitnah and its callers who throw people into the fire and the lack of one group and one imam.

For that reason, we see a great focus by the preceding scholars on the preservation of the position of the imam and avoiding the appearance of factions and parties in the body of the group of Muslims, to the extent they made it obligatory, by Allah's orders, to listen to and obey to imams, fight under their banner, pay zakat through them, and prohibit violating covenants with them, rebelling against them or fighting them with the sword, as long as they adhere to Islam and commit to its beliefs that distinguish Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama'h from the people pf innovations and desires.

This is because with the preservation of the imamah, the group of Muslims is preserved, and with its degradation, the group is weakened until its entity is removed, if it does not have a Muslim imam to unite it. Such is what afflicted the Muslims when the emirs ruled over the caliphs at the end of the Abbasid era, and they were divided and dominated by their enemies, after the imamah became a formal and not an actual position, until it was completely removed, and nothing remained, neither in name nor image.

In conclusion, we should realize the great blessing from Allah to the Muslims of this time, when he enabled a group of them to reestablish the obligation of imamah in the Ummah after it was killed, and to renew its features after they were buried. Allah gathered all Muslims in one group, in which He protected them from falling into the many fitnah that stormed the factions and parties, and sent some of them into deep valleys of misguidance. This one group closed many of the gates of Hell into which the callers of misguidance and emirs of division fell. Therefore, the mujahidin have been extremely keen to preserve this blessing, no matter how bad the fitnah and turmoil, and Allah is the best supporter and helper, and all praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all creation.